

NSC BRIEFING

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5 March 1958

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ITALY (long)

- I. Two recent issues have led to bitter church-state conflict in Italy.
- II. On 1 March a Florence civil court convicted Bishop of Prato of "criminal defamation of character" for denouncing as public sinners, in a 1956 pastoral letter, a couple married in civil ceremony instead of church.
 - A. All Italian newspapers taking strong stand on one side or other.
 - B. Situation poses dilemma for ruling Catholic Christian Democratic party.
 1. Trying to minimize ill effects on party's political prospects, Premier Zoli said on 3 March he was "sorry as a Catholic, but thinks justice must take its course."
- III. An anti-church article written by former French diplomat Peyrefitte. In 23 February pro-Communist Paese Sera Peyrefitte criticized Pope and entourage. This drew a Vatican protest to Italian government.
 - A. Foreign Trade Minister Carli, the only independent in the Christian Democratic cabinet, reportedly offered his resignation after sending cordial letter to Peyrefitte, a personal friend.
 - B. By refusing Carli's resignation Zoli averted "Vatican caused" cabinet shuffle.
 1. But if Vatican presses the issue it may still do the Christian Democrats harm in the approaching elections.

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IV. Church-State relations likely to be explosive issue in nationwide elections to Chamber of Deputies to be held probably in May or June, possibly as late as mid-August. Christian Democrats maneuvering to have simultaneous elections for the Senate whose term expires next year.

A. Church-State issue will hurt Christian Democratic electoral chances.

1. This development reinforces the probability that the Christian Democrats will not receive a working majority in the next Chamber as some Christian Democratic leaders had hoped.
2. Therefore, the post-electoral government will probably be a continuation of present minority one-party government or a shaky coalition.

B. Achille Lauro's right-wing Popular Monarchist party will probably benefit most from Christian Democratic losses among the party's clerical following.

1. Saragat's Democratic Socialists will be the major recipient of votes from the non-clerical Christian Democrats.
2. Communists press, which has been exploiting the issue, is likely to make full use of it to bolster its election campaign.

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BACKGROUND PIECE ON ITALY

I. The trial of the Bishop.

- A. Bishop of Prato irritated by increasing number of civil marriages
- B. Mario Bellandi, baptized Catholic but professed atheist married 12 August 1956, in civil ceremony only, Loriana Nunziati, who had been a practicing Catholic.
 - 1. Bishop had warned bride to no avail.
- C. Bishop published pastoral letter read to faithful on 12 August 56 stating civil marriage not marriage but "beginning of scandalous concubinage," calling couple public sinners, and refusing Nunziati all sacraments.
- D. Bellandi whose health had been undermined as prisoner of war and who suffered paralytic stroke month after marriage, filed suit for defamation.
- E. Bishop, refused to attend trial beginning Florence 23 February, on grounds civil court lacked jurisdiction.
- F. 1 March Bishop found guilty of defamation of character, given suspended fine of \$65 and ordered to pay trial costs.
- G. 4 March Bishop's lawyers appealed sentence. This is being interpreted as recognition of the court's jurisdiction.

II. Party strengths in present chamber:

| Party | Seats (total 590) | % Popular vote in '53 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Communists | 142 | 22.7 |
| Socialists | 75 | 12.7 |
| Democratic Socialists | 19 | 4.5 |
| Republicans | 5 | 1.6 |
| Christian Democrats | 261 | 40.7 |
| Radicals | 1 | -- |
| Liberals | 13 | 3.0 |
| Neo-Fascists | 25 | 6.9 |
| There are 10 unaffiliated members | | 5.9 |

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